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DISCUSSION PAPER 16

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November 1988

ABSTRACT

Official statistics are often used inappropriately by the media to describe criminal behaviour in a given area. Criminologists and those who work within the criminal justice system are aware that these data are influenced by the reporting and recording practices of local police departments. For example, different police departments may have different strategies for screening cases, particularly those involving minor offenses and juveniles. By computing a ratio of screenable and less screenable crimes, one might create a "processing index" that reflects some of the dynamics of a given police department.

This paper also suggests that police screening practices may differ between those located in the central city and those located in the suburbs. The main argument is that the crime rate of "central cities" can be inflated if offenders from suburban communities find attractive targets in downtown or central areas. Because many crimes may be committed by outsiders, central city police may be less lenient in dealing with juvenile offenders and those who commit petty crimes. Compared to policing units located in suburban areas, central city police may be more likely to process cases through the criminal justice system instead of using alternative measures. A processing index for property crime was created for 22 police jurisdictions in the lower mainland of British Columbia to assess these factors.

The authors would like to acknowledge support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada through their Contributions Grant.

Valuable advice was provided by Allan Markwart, Sandra Edelmann, Brian Pollick, Supt. A. Oosthoek, Insp. Ben Gwaltney, Hank Matthias and many others connected with juvenile justice in the Vancouver Area, and Sangadassa de Silva and his colleagues at the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. Leslie Kennedy and Diane Cossins provided helpful comments on the manuscript. Particular thanks are due Judy Reykdal who assembled and reassembled the data so that it could be utilized more effectively. The interpretations, however, are the responsibility of the authors.

Interpreting Official Crime Statistics

The most frequently cited crime statistics are those which are "known to the police." These are readily available for each province and for the major metropolitan areas. Compared to eastern Canada and the Maritimes, the West has consistently had higher rates. When these rates are reported each year in newspaper articles, criminologists are often asked to explain this regional discrepancy. While the public often assumes that higher rates reflect greater criminal activity, criminologists and those who work within the system are aware that other factors also influence crime rates.

Crime rates are especially sensitive to the recording and reporting practices of local police departments. The police often find themselves under public scrutiny and high rates of crime may lead to public outcry for the police to do something. A mayor or chief of police can "wish" crime rates down by rewarding those at the front end of the system for producing low rates (New York City, 1952). The public can also exert pressure on the police to misclassify certain criminal events. For example, in the U.S. burglary requires that the offender enter a building; if a thief takes something from a patio, it should not be classified as a burglary. However, an irate citizen may feel he has been burglarized, and the police officer may go along with the definition of the victim (McCleary, Neinstedt and Erven, 1982). Even if these pressures are understood and controlled, the way in which reported crimes become recorded can influence the final count of crimes officially known to the police. For example, certain practices in Calgary led to some assault cases being screened at an earlier stage of the process while similar cases were recorded in Edmonton (Silverman, 1977). Moreover, changes in police policies are also likely to modify recording practices. Seidman and Couzens (1974) reported how the introduction of a new program lead to lower rates as detectives reclassified certain crimes.

Such problems with official statistics lead many criminologists to question their utility for further research. Labelling theorists argue that crime statistics reflect primarily system biases while others, such as Nettler (1982), have argued that crime rates are indeed indicative of actual criminal behaviour. However, in a recent English study, Farrington and Dowds concluded that crime rates are more reflective of police recording practices than actual criminal behaviour (1985:71). Thus, using official statistics as mainly measures of police activity, particularly with regard to juveniles, this paper will attempt to provide some insight on how police who work in central cities, that is, cities surrounded

by suburbs and provide services for those suburbs, may differ from suburban police in the way they deal with young offenders. That is, central city police may be dealing with juveniles who are either strangers or outsiders more frequently than their suburban counterparts.

Charge rates were utilized in this paper since they were assumed to be better measures of police activity than 'crimes known to the police'. Another major assumption is that the police exercise more discretion when they are dealing with juvenile offenders and when responding to minor crimes. How this discretion is exercised is often dependent on local police policies. Although such policies are poorly understood, we will construct a processing index using charge rates which may provide insight into police screening practices. To simplify our discussion we will use only 2 categories of crime: break-and-enter (B&E) and petty theft. First, we examine a few factors which influence both reported rates of crime and charge rates.

Reported Crime vs. Charges Laid. Reported crimes are 'crimes known to the police'. However, not all such crimes are subject to the police laying charges. Before a charge can be laid, the police must not only know about the crime, they must identify a suspect. Most people report cases of B&E, but the offenders are frequently unknown. As a result, a fairly high percentage of B&Es are actually recorded, but the police cannot charge very often unless they have clues about the identity of the offender. For example, federal statistics indicate that Vancouver had a rate of 11,582 B&Es per 100,000 in 1985 with a charge rate of 981. The ratio of offenses known compared to offenders charged is about 12 to 1.

Petty theft may have another pattern. Although common in stores, small thefts may not be reported unless the offender is caught on the spot. For theft then, a recorded theft figure may be more likely to represent a known offender than a B&E; that is, someone to whom the police can respond by laying a charge. This is consistent with the 1985 theft figures for Vancouver which shows a ratio of 7 known thefts to each charge.

We are assuming that the police use less discretion at the recording stage and more discretion when a decision must be made regarding a charge. To oversimplify, B&E records may represent a higher percentage of the *actual crime* while theft records may represent a lower percentage of the actual crime. By contrast, theft records may represent a higher percentage of *offenders* while

B&E records include a lower percentage of offenders. Boydell and Connidis (1982) suggest that roughly 25% of the property offences known to the police lead to charges with about half of these being prosecuted in court. While this may be true on average, the pattern differs considerably for each crime and for different police departments. For example, in 1985, Toronto police charged people for theft at about 2 1/2 times the rate compared to Vancouver. Toronto also charged for B&Es at about 3 times the Vancouver rate. If the Toronto police are able to clear 39% of their B&Es with a charge when Vancouver cleared only 12%, it is possible that many "known" B&Es are simply not recorded in Toronto. Some police forces argue that a high charge rate shows that they are efficient and doing a good job, but it could also mean that B&E offenders are being persuaded to plead guilty to burglaries they did not commit to help the police clear more cases. A high charge rate could also mean that fewer burglaries with poor leads are recorded. Our point, however, is that the conditions are different for theft and B&E cases and different even more if the offender is a juvenile. By focusing on selected police units in British Columbia, we reduce some of the disparity which can exist from province to province and can utilize the knowledge the police have of neighboring police forces.

Some researchers point out that official recorded crime statistics are reasonable estimates of actual crime (O'Brien, 1985: Chap. 5). Burglary rates in the U.S. correlate fairly well with victimization studies. Thus, for some purposes official rates are useful. For example, trends over time assume that the biases inherent in various systems are somewhat constant and usually permit us to assume that some trends reflect changes in the behaviour of criminals. On the other hand, theft rates do not correlate as well with victimization studies. However, this paper is interested in statistics that reflect police or system behaviour. In the case of juveniles, the way the police respond may be crucial to providing certain services to juveniles and their families. Most criminologists want to control for system biases so they can get a better measure of criminal behaviour. This paper tries to do the opposite. Thus, we wish to understand how much the actual behaviour of juveniles influences these data so *we can control for it, leaving better measures of police strategies.*

The danger of using total crime rates. In Canada, crime rates display an east-west pattern. When we compare provinces on the rate of crimes reported, the West tends to have higher crime rates than the East. If we can assume that reporting is similar across Canada, some would argue that *total* crime rates are a reasonable way of comparing one geographical area with another. However,

the vast majority of total crime rates arise from minor crimes. If minor crimes rates are more susceptible to local police practices, *real* differences in crime rates, and particularly serious crime rates, could be obscured by differential practices in the way minor crimes are processed. In addition, the way police and prosecutors respond to minor crimes will probably be more variable than the way they respond to serious crime. Thus, we feel that the use of *total property crime* or *total violent crime* as a way comparing communities or provinces can be misleading.

If we were to focus on total property crime rates, we would be combining both theft and B&E rates along with other property crimes, thereby mixing the influence of different police screening strategies. In addition, the more numerous minor offenses, such as petty theft, overwhelm the number of more serious offenses such as B&E's, and therefore, do not give a good picture of the type of crime which most concerns the public. Police decisions to lay charges usually depend on the seriousness of the offense. Since the less serious crimes are probably more susceptible to local policies, the total crime rate may represent these processing practices. For example, the low property crime rate for Montreal can be partially attributed to police preferences for dealing informally with young offenders picked up for minor crimes. Other police forces such as the Calgary police, may be inclined to charge and refer young offenders on to the Youth Court. This would lead to a high reported crime rate and a higher number of offenders entering the courts (Hackler, 1986).

A processing index: the ratio of "screenable" to "less screenable" offenses. In a previous paper we argued that certain crimes are easier to screen by the police than others (Hackler and Don, 1987). Petty theft was used as an illustration of a crime which could be screened out relatively easily, especially when the offender was a juvenile. On the other hand, B&Es are less likely to be screened out at the discretion of the police since they are considered more serious. While we feel that there will be more variability in screening theft cases across different police departments, we acknowledge that screening policies will influence B&E rates as well.

By calculating a ratio between theft and B&E cases, we can calculate a "processing index" for different communities. In our previous paper we calculated such indices at the provincial level. We argued that B&Es are less "screenable" while the police could utilize screening practices for petty theft that would reduce the apparent rate.

The use of a "processing index" might call our attention to provincial differences in police strategies, but it is clear that there are also major variations in local police strategies within provinces. For example, Calgary and Edmonton have utilized different strategies for responding to juveniles for years. Calgary sends more cases on to the court, while Edmonton screens more at the police level (Hackler, 1981). However, we do not argue that one method is better than another. Rather, police units develop different strategies depending on local circumstances. The interaction with prosecutors and probation officers can also have an impact. This in turn will generate different police statistics. A "processing index" may be a useful indicator of this system characteristic.

These processing indices may not make sense to outsiders, but might be understandable and useful to local personnel. When such data are combined at the provincial level, information on the informal dynamics of an individual police unit is lost. Since we are interested in the way juveniles are handled at various stages of the juvenile justice system, it is important to understand the way police respond to juveniles at the point where they might formally enter the system. Can we devise measures that provide insights into police behavior at these initial stages?

Before we can make sense of statistics produced in each local system, we must ask if the relationships with surrounding areas can have an influence. Thus, we first look at the "central city phenomenon" and ask if it modifies crime rate patterns.

The Central City Phenomenon

As every experienced policeman knows, crime is more likely to occur in areas where there are good targets, that is, goods or victims. Patricia and Paul Brantingham (1981) have spelled out a number of factors which influence the time and location of criminal acts. For our purposes, we will limit our concern to something we will label the "central city phenomenon" (Gibbs and Erickson, 1976). Those cities which are surrounded by populated areas, i.e. suburbs, are more likely to act as "magnets" for people living by. Some cities, such as Calgary, have no suburbs to speak of; that is, there are no large surrounding populations living in suburbs or nearby communities which might use Calgary for criminal exploitation. Central cities are not only attractive for work and culture, but they also provide many well known targets for crime (Boggs, 1965).

Victoria, B. C. may be a good illustriation. Based on official data, Victoria, compared with other metropolitan areas displays relatively high crime rates. In 1985 Victoria had a property crime rate of 14,642 per 100,000 population which was one of the highest in Canada. Recently released 1986 crime statistics revealed that Victoria had a similar pattern for B&Es. The B&E rate for Vancouver was highest among metropolitan areas with 3,218 per 100,000 with Victoria close behind with 3,166 (Edmonton Journal, Feb. 19, 1988). B&E rates for Regina were 2,902; Edmonton 2,208 and Calgary 1,233. But do these statistics, especially for Victoria, make sense? Such data usually do not get a lot of attention in the media since Victoria is not one of the larger metropolitan areas. In addition, in a city where you can purchase flowers in front of houses by pushing your money into a box, it is difficult to to think of this community as the crime capital of Canada. Therefore, one might ask if the town of Victoria with its 65,000 people might be seen as a good target for property crime by some of the people living in Saanich, Esquimalt, Oak Bay, Colwood, or Sooke. In other words, Victoria is a central hub for those who live in areas policed by five other police departments. The central city phenomenon suggests that those interested in stealing will focus their activity on those areas which are centrally located, and have better targets than outlying areas. This would increase the crime rates for such central cities. Victoria seems to have these characteristics. Before examining the data, let us consider a few more aspects of our methodology.

Methodology

While *reported* crime is probably the best measure of criminal behaviour, we are primarily interested in the behavior of the police. Therefore, we have concentrated on the *charges* laid by the police in selected communities in British Columbia. Obviously, the true crime rate and the reported crime rate will influence the charge rate, but the charge rate might be the best indicator of police screening dynamics. We suspect that these local dynamics will be more apparent when we look at juveniles involved in minor crimes, such as theft. If we can develop some indicators that reflect these differences, local police departments might be in a position to assess their strategies vis–a–vis strategies used by neighboring departments.

In this paper we make a number of assumptions. First, the police have fewer choices charging serious offenders and greater choices charging minor

offenders, particularly juveniles. Second, charge rates reflect screening policies and/or practices, particularly for juveniles. Third, a ratio of serious to minor charge rates provides a "processing index" which is an indicator of screening practices. Our previous paper used recorded crimes (Hackler and Don, 1987) while this paper focuses on police charges. It is not clear whether the above logic applies to both recorded crimes and charges laid by the police. We can distinguish factors that influence recorded crimes as distinct from charges, for example, the offender must be known to be charged; but we do not know if these factors vary significantly from community to community. One must spend time in individual police departments analyzing the handling of specific cases before one can judge the utility of these "processing indices" produced in this paper.

Although our primary concern is with the processing of juveniles, it is difficult to understand how juveniles are handled without understanding strategies for dealing with adults. Therefore, we compare charge rates for men and boys in 22 police detachments in British Columbia, mostly from the Vancouver area. We have included Victoria and Nanaimo, including surrounding jurisidictions which feed into these Youth Courts. Prince George was also included because it displays an unusually high delinquency rate. Our goal was to select a manageable number of RCMP and city forces from communities with characteristics that are familiar to many people in the area.

These police departments relate to each other in different ways. In addition, the nature of the link with the Youth Court will vary. In some cases a single police unit feeds into a single Youth Court. At other times as many as six different police units will feed their cases into a single Youth Court, such as Victoria. It is unlikely that an outsider will be able to look at these statistics and interpret them successfully. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the police and probation officers working in these systems will be able to make sense out of them. By looking fairly intensively at a modest number of local police units and their statistics, and by making certain calculations, it is possible that researchers and system personnel together will better understand local police strategies.

Theft and B&Es in Central Cities

The central city phenomenon seems to be operating for men charged with theft and B&E. If we look at Table 1 we can see that the charge rate for

theft (averaged for 1981–1985) for men in the city of Victoria (627) is higher than the surrounding suburbs (52 - 254). The same pattern applies to the charge rate for B&Es. Victoria has a rate of 239 men charged with B&Es compared to the range of 68 to 176 in the nearby communities. Note that the central city phenomenon seems to operate for boys for theft, but not for B&Es. The Victoria theft rate for boys charged is 215 compared with 38 to 107 in the surrounding areas. However, the rate for boys charged with B&Es in Victoria is 92 compared with 46 to 181 in the outlying areas. While youths may go downtown to steal, would they stay closer to home for their break-ins? By contrast adult burglars may find commercial targets in the central city more attractive.

The average charge rates for thefts and B&Es in Victoria are even higher than those in Vancouver, a port city with a tradition of drug dealing and typically with the highest crime rate in Canada for the major metropolitan centres. Obviously, the central city phenomenon should apply to Vancouver as well, which is at the hub of a large collection of suburban communities such as Burnaby, Richmond and Surrey.

The size of the community will probably influence the ratio between recorded crime and charges laid. One might assume that Vancouver would have more break-ins where the offender is unknown. In the smaller community of Victoria, there are fewer offenders and the likelihood of identifying the offender is greater; hence, we might expect more charges. The prosecutor can influence these rates, and discussion with personnel in Victoria suggested that over the past decade different prosecutors have applied different policies regarding juveniles. Although the mechanisms are not well understood, the Victoria police have been less inclined to screen theft cases than Vancouver. In Victoria the prosecutor serves all of the police departments, that is, Victoria plus the other 5 surrounding areas; thus, we might argue that the differences in rates between Victoria and the 5 surrounding areas may be influenced by the number of cases coming into the jurisdiction of the Victoria police or by police practices in the surrounding areas.

After riding with the police and interviewing probation officers, the senior author of this paper argues that in both Vancouver and Victoria there are good relations between probation officers and police, with probation officers riding in police cars at times. Therefore, informal links between police and probation officers might encourage police to give juveniles a second chance. This

TABLE 1

Males Charged with Theft and B & E's in
22 Communities* in British Columbia
(1981 - 1985)

		THEFT		B & E's	
	Population	5 year Avg-Men	5 year Avg-Boys	5 year Avg-Men	5 year Avg-Boys
Vancouver City Mun.	417,422	550	59	170	64
Victoria City Mun.	65,223	627	215	239	72
Saanich Mun.	79,025	150	82	74	90[1]
Esquimalt	16,154	254	63	120	46[1]
Oak Bay Mun.	16,853	52	38	68	53
Colwood Prov.	33,152	126	105	164	181
Sooke Prov.	8,619	78	107	176	170
Sidney Mun.	8,448	206	187	104	171
Sidney Prov.	7,104	84	42	167	135
Central Saanich Mun.	11,485	90	57	81	55[1]
Ganges Prov.	6,844	73	37	248	207[1]
Nanaimo Mun.	49,585	400[1]	276[1]	265	237
Nanaimo Prov.	8,356	38[1]	36[1]	57	97[1]
Ladysmith	10,465	101[1]	31	63	101[1]
Prince George City Mun.	68,591	506[1]	371	263[1]	288[1]
Prince George Prov.	11,709	49[1]	37[1]	126[1]	123[1]
N. Vancouver City Mun.	34,827	246	67	132	93
N. Vancouver Prov. Mun.	65,446	101	39	94	50
Maple Ridge Mun.	32,675	200	138	206	150
Maple Ridge Mun.	7,750	109	41	85	79
Langley City Mun.	15,621	428	132	268	101
Langley Township Mun.	47,108	148	61	127	151

* The first detachment noted in each set of police forces is the central city unit. All other units listed below the central force are located in the suburbs.

1 A rate of 0 was recorded for one of the years and was deleted from our analysis. Therefore, only a four year average was calculated.

seems possible in both cities, but Table 1 suggests more screening in Vancouver but less in Victoria. Could the prosecutors make a difference? For years Vancouver prosecutors at the youth court have been well integrated into the system in the sense that their offices are physically located in the same building as the court. They have access to probation officers and judges. By contrast, in other cities such as Edmonton, the Youth Court attempts to isolate judges, prosecutors, and probation officers. While the notion of separation and minimum communication among those playing distinct roles in the juvenile justice system has some theoretical legal benefits, we feel that the flexibility and creativeness that results in a better communication network among those in the system provides more adequate services to juveniles. However, one should not assume that good rapport among different components of the system will automatically lead to extensive screening of juvenile offenders who commit minor offenses. Despite considerable informal communication, the Victoria data indicate little screening. We have no adequate explanation for this difference aside from the possible impact of the central city phenomenon.

Just north of Victoria and its 5 surrounding communities is the town of Sidney where a small court serves two surrounding police forces and a 6 man RCMP detachment in Ganges on Salt Spring Island, which is just a short ferry boat ride away. Although Sidney has a population of 8448 people, its charge rate for theft for adults and juveniles (206 and 187) is higher than the surrounding areas of Central Saanich (90 and 57) and Sidney Provincial (84 and 42). Although the central city phenomenon is operating for theft, it does not seem to be operating for male offenders charged with B&Es. B&E targets may be just as plentiful, and offenders may be easier to identify in the suburban areas. In fact, Ganges produces some surprisingly high rates for both men and boys. The B&E charge rates exceed those of Victoria and Vancouver (248 vs. 239 and 170 for men; 207 vs. 72 and 64 for boys). Should we notify the newspapers that they should not select larger communities as the B&E capital of Canada but give that title to Ganges on Salt Spring Island, or does this have something to do with the likelihood of identifying the offender? The 7000 people on Ganges live in a bucolic setting where crime probably does not play a major role. But what happens if Mabel discovers that her TV set is missing? She probably knows the six policemen on the island, and they may even recognize her TV set. The police may check the next ferry, look for people they do not recognize, and see if any of the autos waiting in line have Mabel's TV in the back seat. Compared to larger cities, the police in this small community are likely to be more familiar with the local residents, and, therefore, can easily

recognize and question outsiders. In other words, B&E may not be as common in Ganges as in Vancouver, but the likelihood of being discovered and charged is much greater for a burglar on an island with a limited road network.

The charge rate for theft appears to reflect different dynamics than the charge rates for B&Es. Ganges has rather low charge rates for theft for both men and boys (73 and 37). Given its small population, Ganges is not likely to have too many attractive targets or stores to attract outsiders who wish to steal. Moreover, the police are more likely to know many of the residents of the community and, thus, are in a better position to screen theft cases for both adults and juveniles.

For boys, a screening process for theft cases seems to be operating in Vancouver as well. The rate of men charged was 550 while the rate of boys charged was 59. The ratio between the charges laid for men and boys may provide a measure of the juvenile screening used by the police. The charge rate for theft for boys in Vancouver was about 1/10 the rate for men. In Victoria it was about 1/3. We suggest that Vancouver screens juveniles who commit theft more than Victoria. Later we will propose a processing index to measure this characteristic.

In looking at the rest of Table 1 we can see that the central city phenomenon also seems to be operating, particularly for theft, in Nanaimo, Prince George, North Vancouver, Maple Ridge, and Langley for both men and boys. These central cities or towns have charge rates for men for theft of 400, 506, 246, 200, and 428. Their surrounding communities have smaller charge rates of 38 and 101, 49, 101, 109, and 148. The same pattern applies to charges for theft for boys with the rates for the central cities usually being several times the rate for the surrounding areas (276, 371, 67, 138, and 132 compared with 36 and 31, 37, 39, 41, and 61). Smaller central towns may display this phenomenon even more than larger cities.

These central cities have different characteristics. For example, Prince George, Nanaimo, and Maple Ridge are much larger than their surrounding populations. North Vancouver and Langley, on the other hand, are smaller than the surrounding populations which might make use of their urban services. In addition, the headquarters of the police detachment which serves surrounding areas is sometimes located within the central city or town, sometimes near or sharing facilities with the police unit serving the city. The administrative

division between services in a city and in the surrounding areas generates statistics that may or may not reflect the relationship between the policing units. At any rate, the central city phenomenon helps to explain why some communities seem to have larger than anticipated property crime rates. The dynamics of screening boys for minor offenses is not as well explained. Vancouver and North Vancouver seem to screen more theft, while Victoria, Sidney, Nanaimo, Prince George, Maple Ridge and Langley seem to screen fewer cases.

Prince George does not appear to screen juveniles hardly at all. In the past, Prince George has had similar rates of reported total property crime similar to Vancouver (11,000 per 100,000 population in 1983), and in Table 1 we note that the rate of adult males charged for theft is similar in both cities. (Vancouver has a charge rate for men of 550 while Prince George has a rate of 506.) However, when we compare the charge rate for boys, Prince George has a rate that is six times higher than Vancouver (59 to 371). Are the boys so bad in Prince George, or does the system pass more cases on to the courts? The charge rates for B&Es display a similar pattern with about one-quarter as many boys being charged for B&E in Vancouver compared with Prince George (64 to 288). While it is possible that boys are much more criminal in Prince George, it is more likely that the systems have developed different strategies for responding to juvenile theft and B&E's.

Charges for B&E will not necessarily reflect the same pattern as for theft. Good targets for burglary may be as common outside of central cities, especially for boys with limited mobility. In addition, the actual crime generated by the central city phenomenon may be countered by the difficulty of identifying offenders when central cities are large.

At this point we might ask why we are seeking measures of screening at the entrance to the juvenile justice system. In general, we feel that Canada uses the courts to deal with some social problems that might be handled more effectively in an alternate manner. Thefts sometimes represent family troubles. Juveniles running away frequently steal food or clothes. The police are often aware that such crimes reflect other problems. Some countries, such as France, work very hard to avoid a legalistic response (Hackler, Garapon, Frigon, and Knight, 1987). We are clearly biased in suggesting that Vancouver may have developed useful strategies that screen certain social issues from the juvenile justice system. A number of professionals working with juveniles share this bias,

and have been able to identify systems that place fewer juveniles in closed custody; but we do not have clear indicators of screening at the front end. The goal of this paper is to produce the types of measures that would allow local communities to monitor and interpret some of their own activities.

Potentially Useful Processing Indices

In this section of the paper we calculate some ratios that may have some explanatory value. We have earlier referred to these ratios as "processing indices" in that they may provide some insights into the way certain categories of cases are processed into the system (Hackler and Don, 1987). Our interest is primarily in the screening of juveniles, particularly for theft. In Table 2, columns 1 and 2, we have divided the thefts under $200.00 (from Table 1) by the B&E rate for both men and boys. Since we are assuming that the police cannot screen B&Es as easily as theft, we suggest that a high ratio indicates a greater willingness to charge juveniles. In column 1, we find that with the exception of Maple Ridge, the central city phenomenon holds. The police in central cities are more likely than their suburban counterparts to charge men for theft. With the exception of North Vancouver, this pattern is also consistent for boys (column 2).

Although this pattern is consistent for men and boys, when we compare the processing indices in column 1 and 2, different strategies for handling adults and juveniles appear to be operating. For example, the processing index for Vancouver is 3.2 for men and 0.9 for boys. These ratios may indicate that the the system is more tolerant with the boys. In Victoria the two ratios are similar (2.6 for men and 3.0 for boys) suggesting less tolerance toward boys. In comparing processing indices for men and boys, we note that 20 out of 22 ratios are lower for boys (column 2) than for men (column 1). This would be consistent with general thinking that the police are more likely to give juveniles a second chance. Also, in column 2 we can see that the processing index is 1.0 or less for 16 out of the 22 communities. In most communities we would argue that petty theft is a more common crime than B&E; therefore, a processing index of less than 1.0 would indicate a tolerant police response to what is perceived as a less serious crime. This tolerance may be less common in central communities. In 5 of the 8 central communities the ratio is higher than 1.0.

TABLE 2

Four Processing Indices for Males Charged with Theft and B & E's in 22 Communities* in British Columbia (1981 - 1985)

	Men Theft/B&E's	Boys Theft/B&E's	Theft Boys/Men	B&E's Boys/Men
Vancouver City	3.2	0.9	0.1	0.4
Victoria City	2.6	3.0	0.3	0.3
Saanich Mun.	2.0	0.9	0.5	1.2
Esquimalt	2.1	1.4	0.2	0.4
Oak Bay Mun.	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8
Colwood Prov.	0.8	0.6	0.8	1.1
Sooke Prov.	0.4	0.6	1.3	1.0
Sidney Mun.	1.5	1.1	0.9	1.3
Sidney Prov.	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.8
Central Saanich Mun.	1.1	1.0	0.6	0.8
Ganges Prov.	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.8
Nanaimo Mun.	1.5	1.2	0.7	0.9
Nanaimo Prov.	0.7	0.4	0.9	1.7
Ladysmith	1.3	0.3	0.4	1.6
Prince George City	1.9	1.3	0.7	1.1
Prince George Prov.	0.4	0.3	0.7	1.0
N. Vancouver City Mun.	1.9	0.7	0.3	0.7
N. Vancouver Dist. Mun.	1.1	0.8	0.4	0.5
Maple Ridge Mun.	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.7
Maple Ridge Prov.	1.3	0.5	0.4	0.9
Langley City Mun.	1.6	1.3	0.3	0.4
Langley Township Mun.	1.2	0.4	0.4	1.2

* The first detachment in each set of police forces is the central city unit. All other units listed below the central force are located in the suburbs.

Further evidence that a low ratio probably indicates more screening of theft is provided when we look at the *recorded* cases of theft and B&E in British Columbia. In 1985 recorded theft was close to 3 times as common as recorded B&Es in Vancouver and Victoria. However, it is rare that *charge* rates for boys for theft approach 3 times the charge rate for B&Es. To screen the lesser offense is normal, but columns 1 and 2 suggests that the strategy varies across different police departments. The higher ratios for both adults and boys for Victoria suggests a higher rate of charging theft offenders in general. The low ratios for Ganges and the Sidney suburbs may represent extensive screening of both men and boys for theft. In some areas, such as the Langley suburbs and Maple Ridge, men and boys may get differential treatment.

However, a number of factors may influence our processing index and therefore, we must be careful in our interpretion of the low rate. Areas such as Ganges and Sooke may have low rates since theft in stores are unlikely when there are few shopping centres. Also, Ganges has a high B&E rate which would deflate the size of the processing indices.

In columns 3 and 4, we have developed another processing index by looking at theft and B&E separately using a ratio of charges between men and boys. The lower the ratio, the more likely that the system is screening more boys from the system. In this regard Vancouver police seems to be more lenient with boys than these other areas. However, these ratios can be misleading. If the rate for men is unusually low, as is the case of Sooke in column 3, this would inflate our processing index. All other 21 communities have ratios of less than 1.0 for theft, indicating leniency toward boys in charging.

While the pattern of leniency towards boys still persists for B&Es in column 4, 7 of the 22 ratios are above 1.0. This would suggest that tolerance toward boys decreases as the offense becomes more serious. These ratios must be used with caution when comparing police units. A community introducing a new strategy might anticipate a change in these ratios over time. For example, one would anticipate that the introduction of social workers into a police force, such as Richmond, B.C., might systematically screen out some of the minor cases. Thus, we would expect both of the processing indices involving theft to fall (columns 2 and 3). On the other hand, if juveniles involved in B&E were also being passed on to the social worker, the processing index in column 2 may not change because of reduced numbers of B&Es being recorded. That is, we would reduce the denominator as well.

Although these processing indices may be useful to individual police units, they should not be used uncritically as a way of assessing screening strategies. Those people who have faith in rehabilitation might argue that early intervention on the part of the social workers would lead to less juvenile crime in general. These indices might be helpful, but the rates being used here are influenced by too many factors to be used as a reliable means of assessing local programs. On the other hand, neighboring police departments, looking for trends over time, might well find it instructive to compare notes using these indices.

Several factors could make these ratios misleading. First, the demographic profile of a community could make a difference. That is, are there more juveniles in some communities than others? Normally, these differences are rather moderate. The population distributions on the basis of age are not extreme and normally would not explain the great differences which exist in Table 1 and 2.

Another factor which could mislead us is if there is a great difference between the behaviour of boys and men in the same community. While one might normally assume that generational differences would not be great, this question can only be answered with evidence. In general, the difference in the ratios are so great that it is unlikely that differences between the behaviour of boys and men in the same community could account for these figures. It is more reasonable to assume that police might succumb to pressures from upper class parents regarding processing their children while lower class parent may ask police to help them "teach the kids a lesson."

A third factor which could lead us astray involves the way the police respond to B&Es. While we would anticipate a significant differential response to thefts, depending on the age of the offender, we would not anticipate as much variation in the response to B&Es, since B&Es are more serious offences. This assumption is *not* supported by these data. The variability in the ratios based on B&Es, column 4 of Table 2, is comparable to the variability in column 3, which is based on theft. We anticipate that the ratio for B&Es in column 4 would be closer to 1.0 and show greater similarity across police jurisdictions. It is also interesting to note that the variability *among* the police forces is much greater than the variability *between* the two types of crime. It seems that screening and leniency towards boys is possible even with the more serious offense. Community tolerance may also play a major role in the ability of the police to use alternative strategies for handling boys, even if the offenses are serious.

The "Informal" Category in Statistics Canada Data

In earlier statistics released by Statistics Canada, crime data were reported by male and female adults and also by male and female juveniles. There was also a column entitled "not charged." In our B.C. data we have a column entitled "informals". Because of space limitations, and problems in interpreting this statistic, this category has been left out of recent publications by Statistics Canada. However, this is a potentially useful statistic if it indicates those juveniles who have come to the attention of the police but have been handled in an alternate fashion. For that reason we wish to explore these data in Table 3 with the hope that they will become better understood in the future. The "informals" may provide a measure of the number of juveniles who are screened out of the system. It is also possible that this category is used differently from one system to another. However, it could be useful for local personnel since they understand the procedures being used in their own system. Neighboring police units might also be familiar enough with each others' recording system that they could make meaningful comparisons.

So far we have focused only on the boys coming into contact with the police. Since the informal category includes both boys and girls, we need to include girls in our data. The first column in Table 3 is the 5 year average theft rate for both male and female juveniles. Unlike the averaged theft charge rate in column 3 of table 1, this rate differs because we have included the girls. Since the population base is the same, the addition of the girls raises the theft rate. In no case does the new rate double, confirming the traditional wisdom that girls are less likely to be charged for theft than are boys. However, the charge rate goes up considerably in Victoria (215 to 414) and in Prince George (371 to 585). We have already argued that the Victoria and Prince George systems are not likely to screen boys. The increase in rates in column 1 of Table 3 suggests that these two cities are not likely to screen girls either. It is probable that these systems also send more cases on to the court.

Column 2 in Table 3 shows the informal category. A few police units do not use it at all or use it irregularly. We cannot tell if the variance among the units is because of recording practices or because of different ways of handling juveniles. In Column 3 we have divided the 5 year average theft rate for both boys and girls by the average five year rate of informal recordings. A high ratio would indicate a willingness to charge compared to handling cases informally. Can we assume that the low ratio of .4 in the town of Langley indicates an

TABLE 3

Two Processing Indices for Boys and Girls: Charges Divided by Juveniles Handled Informally
Using Juveniles Handled Informally in the Denominator
(1981 - 1985)

	5 year Avg Theft	5 yr. avg. Informals	Theft/ Informals	5 yr. avg. B & E's	5 yr. avg. Informals	B & E/ Informals
Vancouver City Mun.	98	--[1]	--	67	--[1]	--
Victoria City Mun.	414	224	1.9	79	48	1.7
Saanich Mun.	127	204	0.6	98	29	3.3
Esquimalt	74	47	1.6	52	5	11.6
Oak Bay Mun.	42	84	0.5	63	18	3.5
Colwood Prov.	121	273	0.4	189	55	3.4
Sooke Prov.	126	175	0.7	174	122	1.4
Sidney Mun.	280	151	1.9	191	52	3.7
Sidney Prov.	60	33	1.8	142	42	3.4
Central Saanich Mun.	60	141	0.4	74	16	4.7
Ganges Prov.	40	323	0.1	210	103	2.0
Nanaimo Mun.	376	3[1]	117.5	200	--[1]	--
Nanaimo Prov.	36	--[1]	--	116	--[1]	--
Ladysmith	38	113	0.3	106	81	1.3
Prince George City Mun.	585	185	3.2	297	43	7.0
Prince George Prov.	114	9	13.2	126	38	3.3
N. Vancouver City Mun.	119	31	3.8	98	18	5.4
N. Vancouver Dist. Mun.	58	22	2.7	55	17	3.2
Maple Ridge Mun.	190	103[1]	1.9	162	21[1]	7.7
Maple Ridge Prov.	57	--[1]	--	82	--[1]	--
Langley City Mun.	181	421	0.4	111	50	2.1
Langley Township Mun.	70	200	0.4	190	91	2.1

1 A rate of 0 was recorded for at least 3 of the 5 years used (1981-85). Therefore, it was deleted from our analysis.

inclination to screen? Do the higher processing indices for theft of 1.9 in Victoria, 1.9 in Sidney, 3.2 in Prince George, and 3.8 in North Vancouver indicate less willingness to screen in the central towns? If so, it would be consistent with the conclusion that came out of Table 2: central city police are less lenient with juveniles than suburban police. In some cases, where the informal rate is extremely low, such as Nanaimo and the area surrounding Prince George, we should disregard such ratios.

Can these ratios be utilized? Although we argued earlier that Vancouver seemed to have screening mechanisms for juveniles, the police do not seem to record informals. On the other hand, the low ratios for Colwood, Central Saanich, Ladysmith, and Langley may indicate a tendency to screen.

In columns 4, 5, and 6 of Table 3 we have performed the same operation for B&Es. Again, the "informal" category is not separated into boys and girls, and there is the distinct possibility that the police respond differentially to girls and boys. In addition, the "informal" response to girls might vary even more from one police force to another if one examines theft and B&Es separately.

Column 6 shows the comparable data for B&E charges for boys and girls divided by those recorded informally. The ratios are higher than those obtained for theft. This would be anticipated if one assumes that the informal category reflects a form of screening and that B&Es would be screened less than theft. Sooke and Ladysmith have low ratios compared to the other police forces (1.4 and 1.3) but not as low as their ratios for theft (.7 and .3). These differences make sense if we stay with our assumption that the police would be more inclined to lay charges for the more serious offense of B&E than for theft.

While the "informal" category may have been utilized differently by some police units, it is also possible that the majority followed similar strategies. Neighboring police units might effectively compare notes and decide if their figures allow for a meaningful interpretation. Does a high "informal" rate mean that they screen cases, or could it mean that they have developed informal mechanisms of channeling juvenile offenders into a variety of social services? In other words, these data, and possibly these ratios, may permit comparisons among neighboring units which understand the various dynamics and the resources in their own communities.

We anticipated that those police units which were more inclined to handle cases informally would be less inclined to charge juveniles with theft, but other factors could influence these data. For example, the central town of Langley has a reasonably high juvenile theft rate, but it also has a very high informal rate. Is that because juveniles from the surrounding township of 47,000 people come into the central town to commit their thefts; but when they are handled informally, are they counted against the population base of 6,000 which represents the town of Langley?

A cautious interpretation of the informal category is advisable when one looks at Nanaimo. In that city of 49,000 people we see almost no juveniles classified as informal while there is a rather high juvenile theft rate. If we look at the police detachment which covers the surrounding area, we see a very low theft rate of 36 and no cases handled informally. The adjacent area of Ladysmith however, which might be viewed as a suburb of Nanaimo, has a low juvenile theft rate of 38; but the rate for handling juveniles informally is 113. What is not known to the outsider is whether Ladysmith and its nearby police forces actually handle juveniles in a different way or if they simply record their activities in a different way. On the other hand, officers in these three police units might be able to make meaningful comparisons using these figures.

While it is tempting to simply ignore this informal category at the present time, there is also merit in calling it to the attention of various police units. There may be fairly standard practices which leads to cases falling in this informal category. If these were better understood, the ratios, such as those generated in Table 3, might be of some use.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to use official statistics as a way of understanding the screening of juveniles from the criminal justice system. We focused on charges by the police rather than crimes known to the police feeling that this was a better measure of police activity. Different processing indices are offered as a way of making comparisons among police units. While such indices may not be meaningful to outsiders, they may make more sense to police personnel working within geographical areas where they understand characteristics of their systems and those of their neighbours.

Using these measures we reviewed some factors that might influence police strategies towards juveniles. The major factor was the impact of central cities. Those cities surrounded by communities which are more suburban are probably seen as attractive areas for theft and other criminal activity. Thus, police forces in suburban areas will have lower crime rates while downtown areas will have higher rates. Police in suburban areas may be in a position to develop strategies which screen juveniles, while police forces in downtown areas may find this more difficult. We suggest that Victoria provides an excellent illustration of a city with exaggerated crime rates partially due to the central city phenomenon. The various indices developed in the paper are consistent with this argument. However, the city of Vancouver may have developed screening procedures for juveniles in spite of this general pattern for central cities. Alternatively, the large suburbs surrounding Vancouver have their own shopping centres and attractions, and juveniles may look for excitement and opportunities for stealing closer to home. Thus, a smaller city like Victoria may fit the central city phenomenon for juveniles while a larger city like Vancouver may only fit that pattern for adult and more sophisticated offenders.

In general, central cities in south-west British Columbia, particularly the smaller ones, seem to display a higher than average delinquency rate. This probably fits with the common sense knowledge of local police departments.

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